

Research on the Race and Hispanic Origin  
Items on Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal Forms

I. Background

Data on race have been collected in the decennial census since 1790. The methods of collecting data and the items used have changed over time to reflect new populations entering the United States or as selected populations have become important for policy purposes, such as a change in civil rights statutes. Prior to 1970, data on race were collected using interviewers where the race of the respondent was based on observation. In 1970, self-identification became the preferred method of data collection used by the Bureau of the Census. The number of race categories included in the race question have varied from five to sixteen separate and distinct categories.

The entry of new populations motivated items related to ethnicity and national origin to be included, beginning with the 1850 census. In the 1850 census questions on parental place of birth, immigration, and citizenship were included to capture information on European immigrants. By the late 1800's information on Asian immigrants was being collected and by the 1890 census, the race item expanded to eight categories. These categories were a combination of color (races), American Indian tribal status, and Asian National origin.

Classification by race and ethnicity became more complex in the twentieth century as the population continued to expand and different civil rights statutes were enacted. The growing racial and ethnic diversity led the Office of Management and Budget to establish a standard to be used by all federal agencies to collect, tabulate, and publish data on race and ethnicity. In response to legislative, programmatic, and administrative requirements in the federal government, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) in 1977 issued the "Race and Ethnic Standards for Federal Statistics and Administrative Reporting," that are set forth in Statistical Policy Directive No. 15. These standards have been used for more than two decades in decennial censuses, in national surveys of the population, and in data collections to meet statutory requirements associated with monitoring and enforcing civil rights in areas such as housing, mortgage lending, educational opportunities, employment, and voting. The four basic racial categories specified in Directive No. 15 are: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian or Pacific Islander; Black; and White. The two specified ethnic categories are: Hispanic origin; and Not of Hispanic origin.<sup>1</sup>

During the past decade, the standards in Directive No. 15 have come under increasing criticism. Some individuals who report data about themselves, and various users of the data, believe that the categories do not adequately reflect the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the population of the United States. As a result of these concerns, OMB initiated a comprehensive review of Directive No. 15 and established the Interagency Committee for the

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<sup>1</sup>Persons of Hispanic origin may be of any race.

Review of Racial and Ethnic Standards.<sup>2</sup> The members of the Interagency Committee include more than 30 agencies that represent the many and diverse federal requirements for data on race and ethnicity.

During 1996, the Bureau of the Census conducted two surveys, one based on a national survey (the 1996 National Content Survey (NCS)) and the other based on a targeted sample of racial and ethnic groups (the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test (RAETT)). Results from these surveys were provided to the Interagency Committee in its review of Directive Number 15. In each of the two surveys a separate question on race and on Hispanic origin was tested. A combined race and Hispanic origin question was tested in the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test. The race and Hispanic origin questions tested in both surveys were in a single column format. Hence, the results provided to the Interagency Committee reflect reporting of race and Hispanic origin data using a single column response format.

However, due to space constraints and other innovations being tested in the 1998 Dress Rehearsal, the response categories to the proposed race and Hispanic origin questions are formatted in either two or three columns. This format design was not tested in the two surveys conducted in 1996 and therefore additional research is needed to determine if placing the response categories to the race and Hispanic origin questions in double and triple columns will affect reporting by respondents. More specifically, research is needed to assess if respondents will have trouble locating their respective groups, and if respondents will more likely use the write-in line to report their race or Hispanic origin because they are not able to locate their respective groups using the double and triple column format.

## II. Statement of Work

The overall objective of this task order is to conduct cognitive and laboratory interviews with persons of different racial and Hispanic origin groups in order to examine selected features of the race and Hispanic origin questions (specified below) that appear in the Census 2000 Dress Rehearsal short form. The Dress Rehearsal forms are self-administered.

There are two significant challenges in executing this task order. The first is the very tight schedule that must be followed if results from the cognitive interviews are to inform the design of the Dress Rehearsal form. Second is the extent of changes that can be made on the Dress Rehearsal form is constrained. These constraints are driven by the requirements of the Postal Service to have a form that can be processed by their equipment and the change to have a user-friendly form that is less intimidating to respondents than the 1990 census form. Constraints include: keeping the triple columns (the race question) and the double columns (the Hispanic origin question), retaining the color of the form and the icons, using the current instructions to the

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<sup>2</sup>“Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity,” *Federal Register*, Vol. 60, No. 166 (60FR 44674-93), Office of Management and Budget, Monday, August 28, 1995, p. 44676.

questions, and keeping the page length of the short form to one page per person in the household. Changes possible within these constraints include: rearranging the response categories; using text aids, such as bolding and italicization; and using arrows that point down to write-in lines.

**The Census Bureau must have results from the research outlined in this task order no later than September 30, 1997.** Given the extremely short time available for the execution of this research the Census Bureau will consider accepting, as a first deliverable, an oral briefing from the contractor on the overall plan for interviewing and conducting the research. The Census Bureau will require a written report documenting all aspects of the research undertaken under this task order. A list of tasks, deliverables, and dates are provided in subsequent sections in this task order.

#### *The Race and Hispanic Origin Questions on the Dress Rehearsal Short Form*

The Census Bureau's research program on race and ethnicity included extensive cognitive testing (Gerber and de la Puente 1996) to develop the race and Hispanic origin questions used in the 1996 National Content Survey (NCS) and the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test (RAETT) (Harrison, de la Puente, Bennett and McKenney 1996 and Bureau of the Census 1997). Although the cognitive interviews tested a double column format for the response categories to these questions, the actual questions tested used a single column format. However, because of design and space constraints the response categories to the race questions on the Dress Rehearsal short form is a combination of single and triple columns and those to the Hispanic origin question are double columns (see attached form).

In July 1997, the Census Bureau conducted about 10 cognitive interviews with appropriate race and ethnic groups to determine how the format of the Dress Rehearsal form affects responding to the race and Hispanic origin questions. However, more extensive cognitive research is needed to draw definitive conclusions and make any necessary adjustments to the Dress Rehearsal form.

The overall concern driving the research proposed in this task order is the current layout of the race and Hispanic origin questions proposed for the Dress Rehearsal short form and their possible effects on how respondents navigate through the form. Respondents understanding and responding to the race and Hispanic origin questions may be affected by the current layout of the census form. More specifically, one of the concerns is that the Hispanic response categories (Puerto Ricans and Cubans) and the Asian and Pacific Islander response categories (Korean, Samoan and Vietnamese ) listed in the last right column will not be noticed by respondents and may result in misreporting or underreporting. Another concern relates to the location of the response category for the "Yes, other Spanish/Hispanic" and "Other Asian or Pacific Islander." Currently there are no arrows (or other aids) associated with these response categories to show respondents that in addition to marking the response box they are asked also too write-in their specific Hispanic or Asian or Pacific Islander subgroup. Also, these write-ins boxes are currently flush with the left margin, and might be better indented.

Features of the Dress Rehearsal short form and questions regarding these features that the Census Bureau wants the contractor to examine and address through cognitive interviews include:

(1) Key questions to be addressed in cognitive testing of the race question include, Do respondents:

- (a) find the race question difficult to read and follow because of the way the question is laid out?
- (b) read and understand the instruction to “Mark [ X ] one or more races...” ? If the instruction is understood, are respondents able to provide this information without difficulty?
- (c) understand and respond to the race question when the Asian and Pacific Islander subgroups are listed in three columns?
- (d) find the “Other Asian or Pacific Islander” response category in the race question easily and report their specific racial group in the write-in boxes provided?
- (e) find the “American Indian or Alaska Native” response category in the race question easily and report their tribal affiliation in the write-in boxes provided?
- (f) find the “Some other race” response category in the race question easily and report their racial identity in the write-in boxes provided?

Given the limitations noted earlier, what measures can be implemented to assist respondents in reporting in the race question when the response categories are shown in both single and three columns? Possibilities include rearranging the response categories, using arrows along side of response categories, or using visual aids, such as italicizing and bolding, provide clues to respondents when answering the race question. Please note that no wording changes to the instructions for the questions are permitted. However, we are particularly interested in knowing which words in the instruction should be bolded. Possibilities include “one or more,” or “mark one or more.”

(2) Key questions to be addressed in cognitive testing of the Hispanic origin question include, Do respondents:

- (a) find the Hispanic origin question difficult to read and follow because of the way the question is laid out?
- (b) read and understand the instructions that precede the Hispanic origin question and the instructions that follow this question?

(c) find the Hispanic response categories in the Hispanic origin question when they are listed in two columns?

(d) find the “Yes, other Hispanic” response category in the Hispanic origin question easily and report their specific origin in the write-in boxes provided?

Given the limitations noted earlier, what measures can be implemented to assist respondents in reporting in the Hispanic origin question when the response categories are shown in two columns? Possibilities include rearranging the response categories, using arrows along side of response categories, or using visual aids, such as italicizing and bolding, provide clues to respondents when answering the Hispanic origin question. Please note that no wording changes to the instructions for the questions are permitted.

In addition to the aforementioned questions the Census Bureau expects the contractor to review the Dress Rehearsal form and, in its reply to this task order, identify any additional features that may be problematic for respondents.

### *Cognitive Interviewing*

The Census Bureau requires that the research method used be one-on-one, face to face cognitive interviewing. Researchers selected for this task must be experienced in cognitive interviewing with self-administered forms. Researchers should thoroughly familiarize themselves with prior cognitive work on these questions carried out by the Census Bureau. Copies of papers, and reports on this issue will be provided to the contractor once the contract has been awarded.

### *Recruitment of Respondents*

Given the time available to conduct this research and the Census Bureau’s requirements for the racial and ethnic composition of respondents, the recruitment of respondents will be a major challenge. The Census Bureau requires that the contractors in their response to this task order provide specific recruitment plans.

The Census Bureau is interested in the contractor’s strategy for recruitment that will meet the respondent requirements outlined in the next section. In the past the Census Bureau has found success in using community-based organizations to recruit respondents.

### *Characteristics of Respondents and Required Number of Cognitive Interviews*

The Census Bureau requires that all racial and ethnic groups be represented in the research. However, special attention must be provided to those groups, by virtue of the way the current census form is laid out, who may find it particularly challenging to navigate through the race and

Hispanic origin questions. That is particular attention should be given to recruiting persons who identify as Korean, Samoan, and Vietnamese on the race question, and as Puerto Rican and Cuban on the Hispanic origin question.

To the extent possible, the Census Bureau requires that respondents be recruited from different regions of the country. While a mix of educational and economic background is desirable and ideal, the Census Bureau suspects that persons with low educational attainment are more likely to experience difficulty with the Dress Rehearsal short form. The Census Bureau expects that the contractor, in its response to this task order, discuss this issue and how it will be addressed in its recruitment plan.

Provided below are the specific groups along with the number of cognitive interviews that must be included in this research within the time frame of this task order. Although ranges are given, the Census Bureau would like the number of completed interviews to be at least fifty.

The following is the number of cognitive interviews that the Census Bureau requires.

<b>Race</b>	<b>Number of cognitive Interviews</b>
White	2 to 3
Black or African American	2 to 3
American Indian or Alaska Native	4 to 6
Asian or Pacific Islander	10 to 15
More than one race	4 to 6
<b>Total All Races</b>	<b>22 to 33</b>
<b>Hispanic Origin</b>	<b>Number of cognitive Interviews</b>
Mexican	4 to 6
Puerto Rican	4 to 6
Cuban	4 to 6
Other Hispanic	4 to 6
<b>Total for Hispanic origin</b>	<b>16 to 24</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>38 TO 57</b>

### III. Deliverables and Schedule

The first deliverable will be an oral briefing with Census Bureau staff *within one week after the contract has been awarded.* During this briefing, the Census Bureau is provided a final work plan with a schedule of interviews.

**By September 30, 1997**, the Census Bureau is provided written draft recommendations on

what improvements can be made to the Dress Rehearsal form that will facilitate respondents' full and accurate reporting of race and Hispanic origin.

The third deliverable will be a written report documenting all aspects of the research undertaken under this task order. A draft of this report is to be provided to the Census Bureau for comments ***no later than October 31, 1997.*** The final report provided to the Census Bureau no later than two weeks after the contractor receives comments from the Census Bureau.

## REFERENCES

Bureau of the Census (1997), Results of the 1996 Race and Ethnic Targeted Test, Staff in Population Division and Decennial Statistical Studies Division, *Population Division Working Paper No. 18*.

Gerber, E. and de la Puente, M. (1996), "The Development and Cognitive Testing of Race and Ethnic Origin Questions for the Year 2000 Decennial Census." *Proceedings of the Bureau of the Census 1996 Annual Research Conference*, Arlington, Virginia.

Harrison, R. , de la Puente, M. Bennett, C. and McKenney, N. (1996), Findings on Questions on Race and Hispanic Origin Tested in the 1996 National Content Survey, *Population Division Working Paper No. 16*.